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"PRINCIPLES" GOVERNING COLOR.

WITH characteristic common-sense, Lewis F. Day, in his excellent volume, "Every-day Art," protests against the decorative artist being longer bound by the dogmatic "principles" which so servilely have been recognized in England, especially as governing color. "When once a student," he says, "has passed that first stage of art where he has not to ask questions but to do what he is told and believe what is told him, whatever laws the teacher may lay down for him are useful only in proportion to their elasticity. They must fit emergencies. Rigid dogma is more likely to hinder than to help the impulse of his imagination. It is not difficult to lay down general rules if they are so general as to be of comparatively little practical use. One might safely say, for example, that ornament may be so schemed as either to fill or to occupy the space it is designed to decorate, instancing the Arabs and the Japanese as expert each in their own direction. When, however, we presume to lay down definite rules concerning the lines on which all ornament should be based, we are in imminent danger of becoming ridiculous. It is one thing to recognize the value of the lesson conveyed to us in Moresque art, and another to deduce from it unalterable principles on which, ever afterward, ornament should be designed. Again, it will not be denied that the Moors made admirable decorative use of the primary colors qualified with much gold; and it is open to us to follow their precedent. But we are equally free to work on the principles of Titian, if we so prefer. There is no one road to success in anything. What we have to do is to produce good color, no matter though some one else have produced fine color on other principles. Certainly no rules of any kind will make colorists of us. The energetic advocacy of the use of primary colors in decoration tempts one to wish it were possible, once for all, to wipe them from the palette of all but the most expert; for it is only the most expert that can safely be trusted with anything so poisonous as the raw primaries.

The doctrine of the use of primary colors must needs be supplemented by other doctrines equally arbitrary. 'Colors should never be allowed to impinge upon each other;' they must occupy certain set positions; they must be doled out in certain 'proportions'! Certainly, if you will take neat primary tints, you must take also sundry precautions lest those powerful drugs should be too much for you. But if the primaries are so dangerous, why take such pains to employ them? A colorist finds it necessary to hold on to no thread of theory for safety; he can do better than any theorist, without it. He delights to disturb the monotony of a blue surface by touches of green and gray and purple; he brightens a red with dashes of orange, and blurs it in places with brown; a flat tint he accepts only as a necessary compromise; and he makes use of the primaries, as the physician makes medicinal use of poisons, knowing that any excess or indiscretion in their employment may be fatal.

Most of the dogmas as to the proportions in which the various colors should be used, are based upon the fact, or fancy, that a ray of sunlight is made up of colored rays in those proportions. We were taught in childhood that the seven colors of the rainbow went to make white light; later, we learned that there were three primary colors, although there was some doubt among scientists as to what those three were; we are asked now to believe that there are only two primaries. At all events, Nature (who has on the whole not a bad eye for color) has very carefully concealed from us the component parts of white light. It is of

infinite importance to the astronomer and the chemist to resolve colorless light into its elements; but the spectroscope is not likely to revolutionize art, or even greatly to help the artist. You may dissect and analyze, but you cannot draw up any formula for the production of fine color. There is just this fact in connection with the theories of color proportion, that the eye can bear as a rule more of those colors which preponderate in the spectrum. We can endure, that is to say, more of blue than of yellow; but any rule as to the ratio in which colors should be used is as impracticable as it is arbitrary. The very test of all good color is that it is too subtle to be put into words. Only the coarser, cruder tints, that can be quite clearly defined, come within the scope of the theorist. Some trouble might doubtless be spared us, if we could consent to shut our eyes, and swallow obediently some such formula as this: 'Take three parts

to distribute the color of one's background so as to emphasize only such forms as seem to need emphasis. Purity of form needs certainly no 'development' by means of color; it is best appreciated in the absence thereof; and, on the other hand, full, rich color can afford to dispense with some grace in forms that lend themselves to its satisfactory distribution. This is fully appreciated by painters, who habitually sacrifice one to the other, according as their aim is form or color. Its appreciation by the decorator has perhaps been hindered by authoritative dogma. All that can safely be asserted is, that in any scheme of color there should be strict relation between its quality, its quantity, and its situation—that is to say, its quality will be suggested by the quantity in which it is used, and the situation in which it is placed; its quantity will be regulated by the lightness or darkness, the brilliancy or depth, of the tints employed, and by considerations of the light or shadow in which they are placed, and the distance at which they are seen; its situation will be determined by the amount of color used, and the nature of that color.

No need of much philosophy to tell us that the cruder a color the less we must use of it, and the more it should be broken up, and separated from other crude color; or to teach us that low tones are lost in dark places, where bright ones are only subdued to due sobriety and softness. The slightest feeling for color will suggest that the larger the surface of one color the lower it must be in tone (unless again it be in shadow), and that the smaller the surface the brighter it may be. Every house-painter knows by experience that for a ceiling he must mix his tint a shade or two lighter and brighter than he wishes it to appear; but to insist upon the adoption of one color for projections, another for hollows, and a third for flat surfaces, is to prove one's self a theorist beyond redemption. One need not even have studied Chevreul in order to know that some colors appear to advance and others to recede from the eye. Where it was desired to throw back one member of a moulding, we should naturally paint it in some color approaching to grayness, and not bright orange; but it is by no means necessary in architectural decoration to exaggerate every projection and deepen every hollow, as if the architect had expressed himself so timidly that it was necessary for the decorator to underline his words. When architect and decorator are one, he wisely leaves it to the painting to supplement the modelling. He relies, perhaps, upon color to deepen hollows, as did the Greeks when they made their curves so flat; perhaps upon the depth of the hollow to soften the crudity of available colors. This is more nearly the function of color—to qualify form, defining or subduing it as need may be. It may even be said that, art being in its nature experimental, and perfection not often to be obtained, the practical use of color in architecture (wherein form is of su-

preme importance) is often to correct and supplement it, to give variety to what is monotonous, emphasis to what is tame, and unity to what would otherwise be disjointed. In many of the plastic arts what is done is done, so far as they are concerned, and no modification is possible. A stroke of the chisel that has gone too far cannot be recalled; but if the work is to be painted it is the province of the painter to rectify the mistake.

WHY should there not be an American exhibition of Ecclesiastical Art such as is to be held in Reading, England, in October, as an adjunct to the annual Church Congress there? The collection will include church furniture, plate, vestments, rubbings of monumental bronzes, and other ecclesiastical objects,



BOULE EBONY WARDROBE, INLAID WITH BRASS AND TORTOISE-SHELL.

IN THE LATE HAMILTON COLLECTION.

of yellow pigment, five of red, and eight of blue; distribute evenly over a surface geometrically subdivided into small spaces, with care that no two colors impinge; sugar with orientalism, flavor with conventionality at discretion, and serve up boldly in the form of ornamental art! But how is one to arrive at a pure primary color? Our pigments do not approach the purity of the prism. And how is it to be measured? The eye must be judge. Better by far trust to it altogether, and dispense with the incumbrance of a theory.

And then the rules concerning the relation of form to color! One obvious use to which color may be put is that of emphasizing form. But to insist that the development of form is the one and only function of color, is more than rash. Surely it is permissible